

# STRATEGIKA

Conflicts Of The Past As Lessons For The Present

ISSUE 47

JANUARY 2018



## THE STATE OF US NAVAL READINESS

IN THIS ISSUE

SETH CROPSEY • ADMIRAL JAMES O. ELLIS JR.  
ADMIRAL GARY ROUGHEAD • THOMAS DONNELLY

## EDITORIAL BOARD

Victor Davis Hanson, Chair  
Bruce Thornton  
David Berkey

## CONTRIBUTING MEMBERS

Peter Berkowitz  
Max Boot  
Josiah Bunting III  
Angelo M. Codevilla  
Seth Cropsey  
Thomas Donnelly  
Admiral James O. Ellis Jr.  
Niall Ferguson  
Chris Gibson  
Josef Joffe  
Edward N. Luttwak  
Peter R. Mansoor  
Walter Russell Mead  
Mark Moyer  
Williamson Murray  
Ralph Peters  
Andrew Roberts  
Admiral Gary Roughead  
Kori Schake  
Kiron K. Skinner  
Barry Strauss  
Bing West  
Miles Maochun Yu

# CONTENTS

JANUARY 2018 • ISSUE 47

## BACKGROUND ESSAY

**The Sinews of Empire** by Seth Cropsey

## FEATURED COMMENTARY

**Cornstalks, Calvinball, and *The Bridges at Toko Ri*:  
Rightsizing the US Navy**  
by Admiral James O. Ellis Jr.

**A Stretched Navy and a Fiscal Disconnect**  
by Admiral Gary Roughead

## RELATED COMMENTARY

**The Status of US Navy Readiness:  
Too Small, Too Old, and Too Tired**  
by Thomas Donnelly

## EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

Discussion Questions

Suggestions for Further Reading



## ABOUT THE POSTERS IN THIS ISSUE

Documenting the wartime viewpoints and diverse political sentiments of the twentieth century, the Hoover Institution Library & Archives Poster Collection has more than one hundred thousand posters from around the world and continues to grow. Thirty-three thousand are available online. Posters from the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Russia/Soviet Union, and France predominate, though posters from more than eighty countries are included.

# The Sinews of Empire

By Seth Cropsey

Modern scholars of politics revel in their complex descriptions of state action. Rather than oversimplifying and reducing the state to a unitary body, they separate its internal components and assess each of their relative strengths. There's something to this. However, politics is contradictory. Man may create sprawling decision-making bodies, and systems that disperse power at multiple levels. Nevertheless, states are remarkably like people. They feel pride and anger, loyalty and hatred, fear and hope.

States are also structured like people. They have minds, hearts, and amorphous limbs with which to influence the world around them. Moreover, they have sinews, connective links that unite their metaphorical bone and muscle, tie their appendages together, and enable the use of power. Roads and internal thoroughfares are sinews common to every state.

But empires, the titans that shape the international system, derive their power from the seas, and their control over portions of international trade. As such, naval forces are the sinews of great powers. They ensure the free movement of goods between friendly ports, the transit of forces between far-flung bases, and uninterrupted communications between the core, its distant commercial partners, and allies.

Two historical examples help suggest the effect of the sustained cuts to American sea-power that began with the Cold War's end and have continued to today. First, the experience of Habsburg Spain, an empire that neglected consistently to fund its naval forces, and paid the price in its loss to a distinctly inferior power. Second, the experience of the Soviet Union, an empire that saw its naval power grow from 1945 until 1980, followed by an increase in its ability to shape international events.

## Spain—Force Decline and Imperial Collapse

Ancient empires controlled a vast amount of the world without sophisticated technology—Macedonian, Roman, and Mongol territorial expansion are examples. But sixteenth century Spain is the first modern empire in geographical scale and logistical scope. With its significant holdings in the Southwest Pacific, the Americas, and Europe, the Habsburg-run empire was the first upon which the sun never set.

Spain maintained its imperial power through control of international trade, facilitated by its naval and merchant fleets. The Spanish commercial system was global. Beginning in the Philippines, the Manila galleons would transport Chinese goods from the Western Pacific to Mexico. These would join the gold and silver extracted from Central America and Peru that fueled the Spanish economy. The West Indies Fleet of merchant galleons would bear this treasure and trade from the Caribbean to the Iberian Peninsula, and return via convoy to the Indies to take on another opulent cargo. Spain combined its Atlantic treasure fleet and Pacific galleons with a Mediterranean galley fleet that it used to challenge Ottoman expansion and gain control over still-critical Mediterranean trade flows. Naval superiority in each of these theaters nourished Spanish prosperity.

Despite the importance of maritime trade to the Spanish Empire, Spain's sixteenth century Habsburg monarchs consistently refused to fund Atlantic naval forces, despite the Spanish crown's 1550s annual income of 2.5 million pesos and 1590s annual income of 14 million pesos. Habsburg claims to the former Duchy of

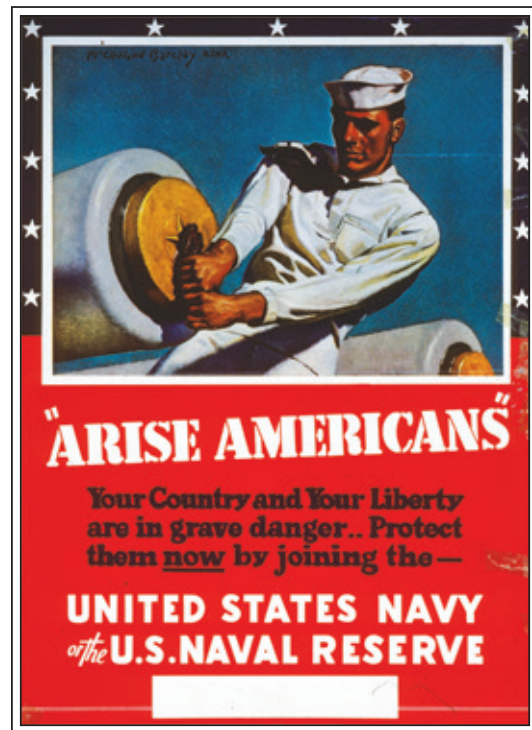


Image credit: Poster Collection, US 02559, Hoover Institution Archives.



Burgundy drew the Spanish Empire into decades of land wars against France, while Charles V's position as Holy Roman Emperor entangled him repeatedly in campaigns against Protestant North German princes. Most important, the Dutch Revolt against Philip II in 1568 initiated eighty years of European and colonial warfare, leading to the continual diversion of funds to Spanish ground forces.

The Habsburg monarchs may have considered land campaigns the strategic jewel in their crown. However, setbacks at sea doomed the Spanish Empire, not defeats on land. The Dutch Revolt inaugurated the era of privateering, first with the Northern European-centered "Sea Beggars" who prevented Spain from blockading the newly established Dutch Republic, and later with privateers who harassed Spanish treasure convoys. Elizabethan England also joined the fray. England's Sea Dogs like Francis Drake, John Hawkins, and Walter Raleigh chewed away at Spain's New World revenues while bolstering English coffers.

Anglo-Dutch harassment disrupted Spanish revenue flows, thus undermining Spain's war of attrition against the Netherlands that was centered on laying siege to fortified towns. Moreover, Spain's lack of sea control in Northern Europe enabled the English resupply of the Dutch rebels, allowing them to sustain their war effort despite distinct material disadvantages. The Spanish Armada was conceived as Philip's decisive stroke against England and the Netherlands. The 130-ship fleet would sail north from Spain and destroy inferior Anglo-Dutch naval forces in the English Channel. After establishing sea control, it would transport the Duke of Parma's army from the Netherlands to England. This 55,000-man force of Spanish *tercios* would knock England out of the war. Parma's force would then descend upon the now-unsupported Dutch, ending their costly rebellion.

Most accounts of the Spanish Armada's failure focus on tactical issues. Creative Anglo-Dutch tactics and poor weather felled Spain's poorly trained and badly led armada. However, the long-term strategic impact of force decline cannot be overstated. Inconsistent funding meant that Spain lacked a modern offensive fleet. It was forced to rely on a small core of hastily constructed galleons, supplemented by outdated armed carracks and hulks, along with light ships. An armada comprised of fighting ships, rather than converted medieval merchantmen, would have stood a better chance to succeed than the fleet that sailed. A more professional and better-trained fleet could likely have managed the poor weather the armada encountered.

Because it refused to match its naval forces to its strategic commitments, Spain suffered a crushing defeat at English hands, from which the Spanish navy and Empire never recovered. Growing Anglo-Dutch naval power wrested control of international trade from Spain, resulting in its ultimate imperial decline and collapse. Great states depend on globe-encircling sea-power. Sea power depends on sufficient numbers of good ships, and leadership that is as capable as the fleet's well-trained crews. None of this is possible without sustained, consistent resources.

### **Soviet Naval Policy, 1956–1985**

Spain's experience illustrates the peril of failing to match force size and shape with strategic commitments—an issue that lies at the heart of the US Navy's downsizing. Alternatively, the Soviet experience demonstrates the increasing strategic flexibility and potency that a properly funded, well-equipped navy can provide any great power.

Land powers that seek greater international influence are wont to expand their fleets. The Soviet Union was no exception. It derived its structural military strength from its population and geography—a strength that Soviet military engagements demonstrated even before the Second World War. However, from its founding the USSR lacked major naval forces. Imperial Russia's 1905 defeat in the Pacific eliminated the core of its naval combat power, while war with Germany in 1914 precluded significant naval expansion. Landward threats consumed Soviet military attention in the interwar period, preventing investments in a navy, and war with Germany once again in 1941 forced the USSR to direct all its military resources to land operations. The "Red Navy" had little effect on the conflict, with 400,000 of its sailors dispatched as infantrymen to the Eastern Front.

Russia entered the Cold War at a maritime disadvantage. Its significant power was trapped in Central and Eastern Europe. Although it could foment revolution and bully regional actors into submission, the Soviet Union lacked tools directly to pressure the United States. The Cuban Missile Crisis demonstrates American naval power's ability to control escalation. Despite President Kennedy's diplomatic weakness and strategic miscalculation, the

United States could use its naval forces to quarantine Cuba, an act that froze the situation and demonstrated Cuba's isolation from Soviet support in a wider conflict. Khrushchev's nuclear ploy backfired. By raising the escalatory stakes, he cut off his own flexibility.

Under the thirty-year stewardship of Admiral Sergey Gorshkov, the Soviet Navy was transformed from a coastal force into one that could project global power. Gorshkov understood the geographic constraints that trapped Soviet power projection, namely the Greenland-Iceland-UK gap and Dardanelles, both of which were in Western hands. Just like the Imperial and Nazi German naval services, the Soviet Navy needed to pierce the West's "far blockade" to operate internationally, and do so without a global network of bases.

Gorshkov constructed a fleet centered on its submarine service. Attack boats and cruiser submarines were intended to pressure American and allied shipping, while SSBN's (ballistic missile submarines) afforded the USSR second-strike capabilities. Gorshkov combined this subsurface fleet, which reached 260 boats in the early 1980s, with a collection of small surface combatants, light aircraft carriers, and long-range strike aircraft designed to give Soviet forces maritime breathing space closer to home, and show the flag abroad.

The Soviets benefitted from their naval expansion most clearly in the late 1970s and early 1980s in Latin America and Africa. The US policy of détente in the 1970s was intended to decrease American commitments abroad by limiting competition to Central Europe. As such, détente catalyzed a reduction in American naval forces—a reduction concurrent with Gorshkov's expansion. From the late 1970s onward, Soviet naval power facilitated communist support for anti-American regimes throughout Latin America. In 1981, Soviet surface combatants escorted 63,000 tons of arms shipments to Cuba, which were in turn distributed to various Latin American communist groups. Soviet assistance helped the Sandinistas gain power in Nicaragua in 1979, and sustained the regime throughout the Cold War.

Soviet military aid to Cuba outclassed US assistance to all Latin America tenfold. Such an effort would have been impossible without Soviet ships and submarines operating from Cuban, Peruvian, and Chilean ports. Moreover, the mere presence of Soviet forces on the critical sea-lanes in the Gulf of Mexico gave the USSR greater potential escalatory control. The Soviet Navy had a similar effect in Africa. Although the Soviet Navy never obtained a permanent African base, the USSR's maritime presence helped deter more open American intervention in Angola and Somalia.

The Cold War's conclusion is typically linked to an overextension of Soviet military capabilities, especially as they applied to its economic capacity. However, the Soviet Navy was a marginal investment success. It gave the Kremlin significant increased policy flexibility from the mid-1970s onwards. The Cuban Missile Crisis might have played out very differently with Gorshkov's fleet on patrol in the West Atlantic.

The Vatican is the one landlocked state in the world that wields global influence. The others that suffer from similar geographic position are limited in their aspirations, whether for good or ill. The United States remains the world's most influential nation and is still the world's greatest sea power. History suggests an inexorable link between consequential influence and sea power.



**SETH CROPSEY** is a Senior Fellow at Hudson Institute and director of Hudson's Center for American Seapower. He began his career as Assistant to Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger and subsequently served as Deputy Undersecretary of the Navy. Cropsey served as acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations, and served as a naval officer from 1985–2004. His articles have been published in *Commentary*, *Foreign Affairs*, *Weekly Standard*, *National Interest*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post*, and other national journals. His most recent book, *Seabindness*, was published in 2017.

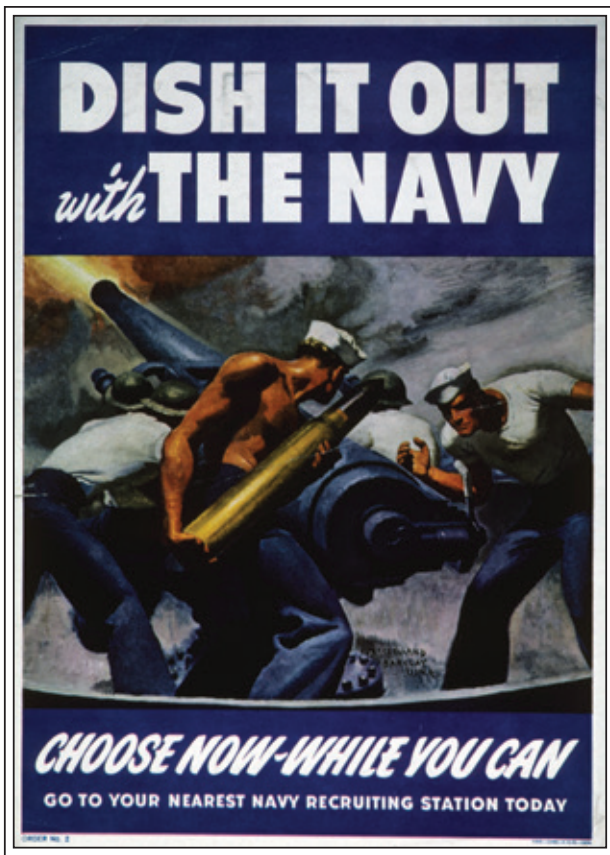


Image credit: Poster Collection, US 06935, Hoover Institution Archives.

## Cornstalks, Calvinball, and *The Bridges at Toko Ri*: Rightsizing the US Navy

By Admiral James O. Ellis Jr.,  
USN (Ret.)

The main street of Washington, Georgia, is called Toombs Avenue in honor of the Georgia senator and Civil War general who was born nearby. In promoting the South's secession as the war approached, Toombs reportedly claimed, "We can beat those Yankees with cornstalks!" After fleeing to Paris following the South's defeat, Toombs later returned, only to be reminded of his prewar claim. Unrepentant to the end, Toombs replied, "Well they wouldn't fight with cornstalks!"

This story has been used for years in national security debates by those advocating for ever-advancing technologies, even at the expense of a larger force structure.

The capability vs. numbers debate is certainly not new to the Navy; over centuries, optimization of the "high-low mix" of very large and/or powerful ships versus those that are smaller, cheaper, and, often, single mission, has raged. The combatants in this operational and budgetary battle included battleships vs. submarines, aircraft carriers vs. amphibious ships, Aegis air and missile defense ships vs. small combatants, and minesweepers and logistics ships against them all. The debate has been recently broadened to include autonomous vehicles and artificial intelligence, unburdened by human presence. While each of these skirmishes, in its time, often had a clear winner and loser, when examined more broadly, the trend toward fewer, more capable ships is both unarguable and, with the exception of the Reagan-era drive toward a 600-ship Navy, inexorable. Navy sources show an active force level today of 275 ships and a nearly continuous reduction from 933 in 1968 at the peak of the conflict in Viet Nam.

It is clear that, for decades, Navy and, indeed, all national security leaders have wrestled with finding the "sweet spot" in balancing quality over quantity. It is also clear that, in most cases, quality has won. Often this prioritization has been driven by existing or potential adversary capabilities that needed to be countered, but it is also true that multi-mission capability, reductions in overall force structure, and attendant lower manpower costs have been touted as long-term budgetary and efficiency advantages as the Navy dealt with fiscal realities, increased operating tempo, maintenance shortfalls, recapitalization requirements, and, most recently, operational failings. For many years, driven by the need to recapitalize the force structure while maintaining or improving fleet readiness in a fiscally constrained environment, the Navy has turned more to business terms and processes such as the Navy Enterprise construct. According to a 2009 Rand Corporation report, the purpose of the Navy Enterprise construct was to achieve efficiencies so that current and future readiness can be met with limited budgets. More specifically, the Navy Enterprise sought to gain an improved return on investments through improved resource allocation and increases in quantifiable output over cost.

The realities of the resultant high-end force are also clear. The more technologically advanced a system, the higher are its procurement cost, operational and maintenance complexity, and the skill and training levels required of its crew. Simple math shows that fewer ships mean higher operational tempo or, conversely, gaps in presence or operational coverage. It also means significantly fewer ships. In straining to bring its unique capabilities in responding to geopolitical reality, the Navy has often found itself in a downward trend of extended deployments and training and maintenance reductions which have contributed to mishaps, material casualties, readiness failings, and, in turn, further shortfalls. In some cases, it has been necessary to deploy high-end surface combatants to low-tech presence or antipiracy operations simply because there are no viable alternatives.

As the post-Cold War Navy has focused on the real demands of ballistic missile defense and Tomahawk cruise missile land-support and strike missions, skills such as anti-submarine warfare, surface combat, and fleet air defense have declined over decades of sailing a largely tranquil sea. But even the recent years of more focused regional conflict have generated real stress. In congressional testimony on readiness last year, the Vice Chief of Naval Operations said, “We have not yet recovered from the readiness impacts resulting from a decade of combat operations. The cumulative effect of budget reductions, complicated by four consecutive years of continuing resolutions, continues to impact maintenance, afloat and ashore. The secondary effects of these challenges impact material readiness of the force, and the quality of life of our Sailors and their families.” Recent data from the Congressional Budget Office allege that the Navy is able to meet only 60 percent of the deployments requested by Combatant Commanders. And all of this is occurring in a national security environment that many are calling “the new normal,” a fact of which Navy and Department of Defense leadership is acutely aware.

While a deep discussion of cause, effect, and opportunities for correction is beyond the scope of this brief conversation, there is an even broader question that needs to be asked. The military is often accused of preparing for the last war; how do we best prepare for a future that, in Churchill’s terms, is a “riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma”? In May 2012, then Major General H. R. McMaster admitted, “We have a perfect record in predicting future wars—right? . . . And that record is 0 percent.”

Even as the Navy continues to address its future needs and the nation considers how best to allocate its national security treasure in terms of dollars and people, the real question is: What will the future look like and do we risk racing to expand today’s capabilities only to find that they may be dramatically less relevant to tomorrow’s threats? In a different national security context, Ben Buchanan, a Harvard Postdoctoral Fellow, worries that we may be, as the old generals (and admirals) are often accused, preparing for the last war. He sees far too much normality of thought and budgetary, programmatic, and regional focus and wonders if we realize that “America’s adversaries are playing ‘Calvinball,’ (the famous game from the *Calvin and Hobbes* comic strip in which there are no rules), while the United States is still playing a regimented and well-defined game of chess?”

In naval terms, in addition to the emergent challenges to our dominance in (and reliance on) both cyber and outer space, that can mean dealing with threats far different than we might imagine in a contest governed by Marquess of Queensbury rules. How do we counter threats to the homeland from depressed trajectory SLBMs or submarine launched cruise missiles? How do we operate in a far more hostile sea where the apparent civilian container ship may, harking back to the Q-ships of World War II, carry antiship cruise missiles, and every merchant ship or fishing boat with a very small aperture terminal (VSAT) antenna can be configured to jam communications or GPS? How does one deal with the purported Russian nuclear-powered and nuclear-armed submarine drone with a 6,200-mile range? The list of possibilities is nearly endless, but the resources and time are not.

Navy leadership is increasingly aware of the need to break the cycle of pursuing increasingly exquisite capabilities in ever-fewer platforms. According to a recent *Financial Times* article addressing the needs of the US Navy, “dramatic improvements in the fields of robotics, artificial intelligence, additive manufacturing, biology, and nano-materials are changing the cost/effectiveness calculation in favor of the ‘small, smart and

cheap’ against the ‘few and exquisite but extremely expensive.’ The convergence of these technologies, and the steady decrease in costs even as capabilities increase, is rapidly expanding the destructive power, range, and precision of weapons that soon will be both widely available and relatively cheap.”

As we look at increasingly lethal global challenges, we should remember that, though potential national security threats are increasing everywhere, in many ways a naval force is far less vulnerable than forces ashore that are fixed in location, reliant on vulnerable lines of communication, and, as we have seen repeatedly over centuries, subject to the vagaries of host-nation tolerance. Speed, mobility, and the ability to operate over three-quarters of the Earth’s surface and disappear into the “trackless sea” will always be an advantage.

It is true that solving the challenges of today’s largely high-end Navy requires even more advanced technology, breaking the cost/capability curve, and analytical processes that can find the right mix of a few exquisite technologies and large numbers of small, smart, and affordable systems. It is not so much change that is the challenge as it is the rate and acceleration of that change. In Lincoln’s words, “The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present.” But it is also true that technology is rarely the exclusive answer, that courage, leadership, and innovative tactics count, and that, as former Senator Sam Nunn said many years ago, “At some point, numbers matter.”

Someone once said, “If you want a new idea, read an old book.” One of my favorites is James Michener’s *The Bridges at Toko Ri*, his classic 1953 novel of American naval aviation in the Korean War. In it, his fictional admiral, in addition to wondering “Where do we get such men?”, presciently muses about the role of technology in future conflict: “Long ago, he had begun to argue that some new weapon—rockets perhaps or pilotless planes of vast speed—would inevitably constitute the task force of the future. He had seen so much change, indeed had spurred it on, that he could not rely perpetually on ships or airplanes or any one device. But until America was secure behind the protection of some new agency that could move about the earth with security and apply pressure wherever the enemy chose to assault us, it would be wise to have young officers trained to command a sea burdened with ships and speckled with the shadows of a thousand planes.”

Rightsizing the US Navy will require reaffirming the national security constants, acknowledging the changing scale and complexity of the maritime security challenges, understanding and adapting to the growing range of threat and budget uncertainties, and, finally, blending technological innovation with the historic strengths of a Navy that, since its inception, has guarded our national security and ensured freedom of the seas.



**ADMIRAL JAMES O. ELLIS, JR. USN (RET.)** retired as president and chief executive officer of the Institute of Nuclear Power Operations (INPO), in Atlanta, Georgia, on May 18, 2012. In 2004, Admiral Ellis completed a distinguished thirty-nine-year navy career as commander of the US Strategic Command during a time of challenge and change. In this role, he was responsible for the global command and control of US strategic and space forces, reporting directly to the secretary of defense. Ellis holds a master’s degree in aerospace engineering from the Georgia Institute of Technology and, in 2005, was inducted into the school’s Engineering Hall of Fame.



# A Stretched Navy and a Fiscal Disconnect

By Admiral Gary Roughead,  
USN (Ret.)

Last year, within two weeks' time, two deadly collisions of US Navy ships in western Pacific sea-lanes brought home the reality of a Navy in increasing demand yet stretched precariously thin. The captains and those responsible on watch those nights, as they operated in congested Asian waters, were held to account, but it remains the nation that has allowed and accepted the conditions that led to those tragic events and the loss of seventeen sailors. As articulated in a review of those incidents that I co-led, it has been a long road to the current level of reduced readiness, and it will not be turned around quickly.

In *Strategika* #31 (April 2016), I addressed the implications of lack of capacity, the numbers of things that contribute to military power. Sadly, the shrinking number of ships in the US fleet led to the pace of operations and the compromises made to meet the growing operational demands. Those demands will continue to be made as the Navy grapples with meeting our global security obligations. Over the past twenty-five years the number of ships in our Navy decreased by nearly half. Although the fleet is significantly smaller, the expectation remains for the Navy to be present in areas of strategic importance, to project power when prompt, assured access to land bases is problematic, and to persistently defend our interests and those of our allies and partners. Today, that means twice the percentage of the fleet is deployed than was at the height of the Cold War.

The recently issued National Security Strategy correctly identifies the challenges posed by China and Russia and the importance of trade to our economic security. Throughout history great power competition and the trade that enables prosperity both played out on the world's oceans. Past is prologue and, as the Security Strategy correctly asserts, nowhere will this be more pronounced nor more consequential than on the sea-lanes and in the vast reaches of the Indo-Pacific region. China gets it, and has blended its economic and security ambitions and strategies. It intends to influence events and outcomes, is following the approach of previous maritime powers, and is investing in appropriate maritime capabilities and, most important, the capacity to succeed. Its navy is growing in numbers and sophistication and it has thoughtfully and quietly created a network of port access to enable distant, longer duration operations in the Indo-Pacific. It is beginning to be contrasted to a diminished US naval presence or perceptions of lack of credible US naval power in that important region. For years China's rising military posture was something that would have to be dealt with in the "out years." Now the "out years" have arrived.

The clarity of the National Security Strategy and the associated intent to substantially increase the size of the Navy are welcome acknowledgements of our geopolitical challenge, but what is said and what is done are different things. If Congress does not resolve the fiscal disconnects between the nation's strategy and what is needed to achieve its ends, the new strategy will ring hollow. Increasing the size of the Navy and investing in the readiness of the current fleet until new ships and aircraft arrive require predictable, sustained investment. In this case, recent past cannot be prologue. Since the Budget Control Act was passed in 2011, the Navy has accumulated a \$102 billion shortfall between enacted base budgets and needs projected in 2012.



Image credit: Poster Collection, US Q2608, Hoover Institution Archives.

Congress has exacerbated that divot by failing to pass budgets in a timely matter, and then defaulting to continuing resolutions to bridge the gap. The consequence is the Navy (and all the services) not having the funds needed in the right appropriation at the right time and, because of constraints in the rules governing continuing resolutions, not having the flexibility to align those funds where needed. In a dynamic force that operates and responds globally, the impacts are immediate and the consequences protracted. It would be less impactful if continuing resolutions were rare, but Congress, constitutionally charged with maintaining a Navy, has dealt the Department of Defense continuing resolutions for thirty-three of the last forty-two years.

Although pressed and stretched, our Navy remains the most capable in the world. But the margin is shrinking. Our young sailors who go forward on the sea are extraordinary men and women who, again, face a rising naval challenge and peer competitor in the Indo-Pacific. Stretched as they are, they will still be at sea, on watch in the vital sea-lanes of the region. Will those charged to “maintain a Navy” provide the means for them to do their job as they see the need and the privilege to do it?



**ADMIRAL GARY ROUGHEAD, USN (RET.)**, an Annenberg Distinguished Visiting Fellow at the Hoover Institution, (2011–13) graduated from the US Naval Academy in 1973. In September 2007, Admiral Roughead became the twenty-ninth chief of naval operations after holding six operational commands and is one of only two officers in the navy’s history to have commanded both the Atlantic and Pacific Fleets. Admiral Roughead is the recipient of the Defense Distinguished Service Medal, Navy Distinguished Service Medal, Defense Superior Service Medal, Legion of Merit, Meritorious Service Medal, Navy Commendation Medal, Navy Achievement Medal, and various unit and service awards.

# The Status of US Navy Readiness: Too Small, Too Old, and Too Tired

By Thomas Donnelly

Seventeen sailors have been killed this year in accidents involving two destroyers, the USS *John S. McCain* and USS *Fitzgerald*. The McCain incident spurred Admiral John Richardson to order a one-day, fleet-wide “operational pause” to search for the root causes of the collisions, but the Chief of Naval Operations did not need to look outside Washington for answers: the nation’s demands on his service have not diminished since the end of the Cold War, but the nation’s investments—in ships, aircraft, equipment maintenance, and sailors and their training—have sunk to unfathomed depths.

While admitting that he sounded like a “broken record” in testimony to Congress, the Navy’s number two leader succinctly explained the service’s dilemma: “Our Navy faces increased demand without the size and resources required to properly maintain and train for our future.” The Navy’s “battle fleet” is currently a bit more than half the size it was a generation ago. At the same time, America’s maritime commitments have grown, particularly in the Pacific and Indian Oceans and the Persian Gulf. Moreover, the reductions in forward-stationed land-based ground and air forces—and the reluctance to commit them to long-term irregular warfare campaigns in the Middle East—has exacerbated the pressure upon the Navy to project power ashore. For example, from their first use in the 1991 Gulf War through the Trump administration’s strikes on Syria in April, the Navy has shot more than 2,100 Tomahawk missiles, while Navy carrier-based aircraft have flown hundreds of thousands of sorties in support of operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria. That is a historically unprecedented capability, but a very expensive way to provide fire support to an isolated combat outpost or to kill a terrorist leader.

Recently, we at the American Enterprise Institute convened a group of retired flag officers to conduct a series of “force-generation” exercises to quantify the Navy’s capacity to respond to deployment demands ranging from steady-state presence missions to simultaneous—but small-scale—crises. The consensus conclusion, also ratified by the many civilian role-players in the game, was that the combination of constant commitments and diminishing resources of the past two decades had “broken the camel’s back,” leaving the Navy too small, too old, and too tired yet operating frenetically to fulfill an expanding number of missions.



**THOMAS DONNELLY**, a defense and security policy analyst, is the codirector of the Marilyn Ware Center for Security Studies at the American Enterprise Institute. From 1995 to 1999, he was policy group director for the House Committee on Armed Services. Donnelly also served as a member of the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission. He is the author, coauthor, and editor of numerous articles, essays, and books, including *Operation Just Cause: The Storming of Panama* and *Clash of Chariots: A History of Armored Warfare*. He is currently at work on *Empire of Liberty: The Origins of American Strategic Culture*.

## Discussion Questions

1. Where and how will continued downsizing of the US Navy most affect America's strategic agendas?
2. Should we continue to build more fleet carriers?
3. How vulnerable are US surface ships to Chinese shore missile batteries?
4. How important will surface vessels and submarines become to new American missile defense systems?
5. Given budget constraints and the spiraling costs of manpower and new technologies, how can the US fleet expand to any great degree?

### POLL: Which statement should best inform our approach to further naval expenditures?

- ☐ Chinese naval superiority is inevitable, and the US Navy should adjust to a new regional and diminished role.
- ☐ America need not worry about downsizing the navy, given its huge lead and the assets of our allies.
- ☐ New technologies will allow the US Navy to maintain supremacy without sizable investments in additional ships.
- ☐ The US Navy cannot meet its present commitments, but largely because many of our strategic needs are obsolete.
- ☐ America must immediately begin a vast expansion of the US fleet to maintain the global postwar order.



## Suggestions for Further Reading

- Donald Chipman, “Admiral Gorshkov and the Soviet Navy,” *Air and Space Power Journal* 33, no. 5 (July–August 1982); 28–47.
- Seth Cropsey, *Seablinde: How Political Neglect is Choking American Seapower and What to Do About It* (Encounter Books, 2017).
- Des Ekin, *The Last Armada: Queen Elizabeth, Juan del Águila, and Hugh O’Neill: The Story of the 100-Day Spanish Invasion* (Pegasus Books, 2016).
- Aaron L. Friedberg, *The Weary Titan, Britain and the Experience of Relative Decline, 1895–1905* (Princeton University Press, 2010).
- Sergei Georgi Gorshkov, *The Sea Power of the State* (Pergamon Press, 1979).
- Robert Hutchinson, *The Spanish Armada: A History* (Thomas Dunne Books, 2014).
- Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783* (Little, Brown, and Co., 1890).
- Kevin Rowlands, ed., *21st Century Gorshkov: The Challenge of Seapower in the Modern Era* (Naval Institute Press, 2017).
- *Strategic Readiness Review 2017*
- Phillip Williams, *Empire and Holy War in the Mediterranean: The Galley and Maritime Conflict Between the Habsburgs and the Ottomans* (I. B. Tauris, 2015).
- *Strategika #31—US Military Readiness*

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

US Strategy in Afghanistan



## Military History in Contemporary Conflict

As the very name of Hoover Institution attests, military history lies at the very core of our dedication to the study of “War, Revolution, and Peace.” Indeed, the precise mission statement of the Hoover Institution includes the following promise: “The overall mission of this Institution is, from its records, to recall the voice of experience against the making of war, and by the study of these records and their publication, to recall man’s endeavors to make and preserve peace, and to sustain for America the safeguards of the American way of life.” From its origins as a library and archive, the Hoover Institution has evolved into one of the foremost research centers in the world for policy formation and pragmatic analysis. It is with this tradition in mind, that the “Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict” has set its agenda—reaffirming the Hoover Institution’s dedication to historical research in light of contemporary challenges, and in particular, reinvigorating the national study of military history as an asset to foster and enhance our national security. By bringing together a diverse group of distinguished military historians, security analysts, and military veterans and practitioners, the working group seeks to examine the conflicts of the past as critical lessons for the present.

## Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict

The Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict examines how knowledge of past military operations can influence contemporary public policy decisions concerning current conflicts. The careful study of military history offers a way of analyzing modern war and peace that is often underappreciated in this age of technological determinism. Yet the result leads to a more in-depth and dispassionate understanding of contemporary wars, one that explains how particular military successes and failures of the past can be often germane, sometimes misunderstood, or occasionally irrelevant in the context of the present.

## *Strategika*

*Strategika* is a journal that analyzes ongoing issues of national security in light of conflicts of the past—the efforts of the Military History Working Group of historians, analysts, and military personnel focusing on military history and contemporary conflict. Our board of scholars shares no ideological consensus other than a general acknowledgment that human nature is largely unchanging. Consequently, the study of past wars can offer us tragic guidance about present conflicts—a preferable approach to the more popular therapeutic assumption that contemporary efforts to ensure the perfectibility of mankind eventually will lead to eternal peace. New technologies, methodologies, and protocols come and go; the larger tactical and strategic assumptions that guide them remain mostly the same—a fact discernable only through the study of history.



The publisher has made an online version of this work available under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonDerivs license 3.0.

To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/3.0>.

Efforts have been made to locate the original sources, determine the current rights holders, and, if needed, obtain reproduction permissions. On verification of any such claims to rights in the articles reproduced in this book, any required corrections or clarifications will be made in subsequent printings/editions. Hoover Institution assumes no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party Internet websites referred to in this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Copyright © 2018 by the Board of Trustees of Leland Stanford Junior University

Hoover Institution, Stanford University  
434 Galvez Mall  
Stanford, CA 94305-6003  
650-723-1754

Hoover Institution in Washington  
The Johnson Center  
1399 New York Avenue NW, Suite 500  
Washington, DC 20005  
202-760-3200

